

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**Spirit filled living in a broken and fallen world**  
**1 Corinthians 7 – Remaking relationships in the Image of God, Part 1**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 15, 2017**

We are a broken people aren't we? We have hopes that are not met and we hold a grudge. We have sins that are hard to shake so we live shamed. We have histories that impacted us poorly so we feel defeated or entitled, one or the other. We are lonely so we feel shunned. We are sick so we feel impotent. We are young so we feel disrespected. We are old so we feel marginalized. We are middle aged so we feel tired.

When do we get to feel ok? The world is a marketing machine. Helping us to feel as though we need something so that we will buy something. The result is that we seldom say to ourselves, "I'm good. No really, life is hard but I am good."

These feelings of confusion and disorientation and self-doubt impact not only our self-identity but also our relationships. The deep parts of who we are in relationships - falling in love, staying in love, breaking off love. These are tough and decidedly moving targets.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians takes aim at these targets. Love, sexuality, singleness, divorce, abandonment, remarriage, love after loss. He gets after it so we will too.

Here is the good news . . .

**The God who made us can also remake us!**

**Lamentations 3:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

This letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth is really good news of renewal and transformation and reclamation – all wrapped in some pretty straightforward advice about how to live in a Kingdom manner in a world that does not recognize the authority of our King.

We left off before Thanksgiving finishing off what theologians call part one of the letter. The first six chapters Paul is addressing concerns that he has heard about the church from insiders that have brought news to Ephesus where he lives in 55AD. So the first six chapters essentially look back to behavior that had led them astray.

Now in Chapter 7 we dive into the second part of the letter, the part where Paul responds to a letter to him from Corinth now lost to humanity, written to him apparently filled with questions and concerns about how to live moving forward into the future. So Paul uses his conversation at the end of chapter 6 about how special our bodies are (temples of God) to create a frame for the conversations he wants to have about sexuality, singleness and relationships in chapters 7 and 8.

**1 Corinthians 7:1-7** Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."<sup>2</sup> But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.<sup>3</sup> The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.<sup>4</sup> For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.<sup>5</sup> Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

This particular passage has been mistreated throughout the centuries. Some have taken verse 1 out of context and made the case that Paul is against marriage and against intimacy in marriage. If you read through it all carefully you can see just the opposite is true.

Anthony Thiselton, one of the foremost scholars on 1 Corinthians, wrote this:

“Paul formulated a positive and sensitive Christian view of marriage far ahead of his times. In the ancient world sexual intimacy in marriage was regarded as a duty for the sake of procreation or as a sexual experience for men that women provided. Paul appears to be the first writer to suggest that such pleasure should be mutual, and he urges both men and women to stop depriving each other of what is rightfully due of the other.” ~ *Anthony Thiselton, 1 Corinthians Shorter Exegetical Commentary*

The confusion comes from the fact that there are no quotation marks in the original Greek language. We have to infer when someone is speaking or quoting from the context. So some mistakenly attributed this comment – “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” - to Paul when more rightly is understood to be a quote from the letter sent to Paul raising questions about relationships and sexuality and marriage. This idiom is floating around the church and they want Paul to weigh in - and he does.

You might say to yourself “Who in that licentious Greek culture would be floating this idea of abstinence?” It most likely didn’t come from the streets of the port town. They had different sensitivities. It actually most likely came from within the church. This idea that the flesh was bad and non-spiritual was an early form of Gnosticism, a heretical idea that has shadowed the church for two thousand years in various forms. Roughly, Gnosticism suggests that Spirit is the only good and the created world and especially our bodies either don’t matter and that has led to licentiousness – or that our bodies must be chastened and pleasures avoided. Both of these lies are addressed by Paul in this brilliantly succinct advice. Like Christ he raises the standard of relationships. He confronts the lies and points us all toward a selfless, giving kind of love that is equally honoring and equally satisfying. That was a very new idea. In fact, even with these pretty clear teachings it seem to me, the church has struggled to teach the practice of intimacy in marriage relationships well:

Yves of Chartres, a bishop in the eleventh century, counseled devote Christians to abstain from sexual relationships on Thursday’s in remembrance of Christ’s rapture, on Friday’s in remembrance of Christ’s crucifixion, on Sunday’s in commemoration of the resurrection and on Monday’s out of respect of departed souls.

That makes Tuesdays and Wednesday pretty busy I guess. The point is while God is the author of sexuality and intimacy, we have made it very confused.

### ***Testimony: DLS regarding Worth Waiting For ministries***

I asked teens all over the world, “Where did they get their information about sex and intimacy?” Top of the list is TV and movies, second is their friends, third is school and fourth is mom (rarely dad) and almost never is the church. That seemed sad to me and it still seems sad to me. These lies that Paul is addressing are killers. These lies kill love and intimacy and

#### **Three of the Five Lies**

**Sex is bad (Genesis 2:23-25)**

**Sex is love and love is sex**

**Sex is only about me**

**Genesis 2:23-25** Adam said: “This *is* now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

With the idea that we are confronting lies we have looked closely at what is NOT being said. Now let's look closely at what IS being said. I'm wondering what about this passage is so difficult to understand.

### **Ummm . . . What about this passage is difficult to understand?**

1 Corinthians 7:1-7, The Message

Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations?

<sup>2-6</sup> Certainly—but only within a certain context. It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. Marriage is not a place to “stand up for your rights.” Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out. Abstaining from sex is permissible for a period of time if you both agree to it, and if it's for the purposes of prayer and fasting—but only for such times. Then come back together again. Satan has an ingenious way of tempting us when we least expect it.

I'm not, understand, commanding these periods of abstinence—only providing my best counsel if you should choose them.

<sup>7</sup> Sometimes I wish everyone were single like me—a simpler life in many ways! But celibacy is not for everyone any more than marriage is. God gives the gift of the single life to some, the gift of the married life to others.

### **The point we must not miss - Sexual desire is God's gift and Satan seeks to destroy it**

#### **1 Cor. 7:5**

<sup>5</sup> Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1. Marriage is not about sex. There are seasons in the marriage when sexual expression is not possible for medical, relational or mental health reasons. Contrary to popular belief, no one has ever died from too little sex. Marriage is about giving not taking, and as we talked about in our intimacy series this past fall, marriage is a reflection of a grand design of God that reveals Himself. It is a mystic and spiritual institution and must not be trifled with. Marriage is not merely sex.
2. Now with that said, let me say that in God's design, marriage is the only place for sexual intimacy. God designed two to become one in hetero, monogamous, covenant marriage and sex before marriage and sex with another in marriage is directly against God's design. The only safe, legitimate and holy place for sexual intimacy is in marriage with your spouse.

And that brings us to our conversation about boundaries.

### **Boundaries!**

Boundaries against the temptations of the world and the lies of Satan are important. Dancing with sin is a bad plan.

ILLUSTRATION: Man walking a hungry lion

Marriage is designed to serve as a healthy fence – a protective barrier from sexual temptation and indiscretion. It is clear from this text that good sexual relations in marriage are intended as a dam against the flood of adultery. Husbands and wives have a duty to offer sexual relations to each other in such a way that the temptation of adultery is significantly weakened.

Notice carefully how I said that. Husbands and wives have a duty to offer sexual relations to each other *in such a way* that the temptation to adultery is significantly weakened. The implication of this text is that husbands and wives should satisfy each other sexually, so that their eyes and hearts do not roam after satisfaction elsewhere. There are many elements that make up this satisfaction. Let me mention three.

First, Paul mentions in verse 5, namely, the frequency of sexual intercourse. He says that married couples should not abstain very long from sexual relations lest they fall prey to the temptation of adultery. Frequency is one element that makes up the satisfaction of sexual relations.

A second factor would be whether a husband and wife are physically attractive to each other. I admit that this is a very sensitive and very complex area. It is sensitive because there are many things about ourselves that we can't change and others that are hard to change. It is complex because the inner union of two people can cause them to see beauty in each other that others can't see.

Nevertheless, if it is true that being physically attractive to each other is part of what makes sexual relations satisfying, and I think this text implies that husbands and wives have a spiritual duty to try to be attractive to each other. None of us can compete with the sex symbols of our day and we shouldn't try. There are some of us, in fact, who put far too much emphasis on exterior appearances. But surely the biblical way is a balance between a nervous self-consciousness about every wrinkle and pound and gray hair on the one side, and on the other side a thoughtless negligence that gives no attention to the way our partner would like us to dress or eat or bathe or act in public or private for that matter. The exhortation of this Scripture is that we should be sexually satisfying to our spouses, in order to head off the temptation to seek satisfaction elsewhere.

Let me insert a warning. Don't infer from this that, if your partner does not satisfy you, you have the right to go seek satisfaction elsewhere. As I said, marriage is infinitely more than sex. And a disappointment in that area is not an honorable discharge from the relationship.

And besides frequency of sexual relations and attractiveness to each other, in the third place but not the last place, satisfaction also depends on the overall quality of the overall relationship. If there is anger or bitterness or resentment or hurt feelings, we don't usually touch each other, let alone embrace. So this text is also an exhortation to humble ourselves and repent and seek forgiveness and renewal in our marriages.

These are good habits, I believe good advice. But more than any of these good habits is our deep inner desire to know God and love Him and follow hard after Him. We ultimately resist all of Satan's lies by knowing God intimately and His truths deeply.

### **We resist Satan's lies by knowing God**

Setting our human ***will and good intentions*** to be holy is not near as effective as setting our ***mind on Him***. Remember how I have been pounding on how God has authority over all things? Look at this verse and let it encourage you in your relationships.

**2 Peter 1:3-4** His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Author and speaker Sheila Wray Gregoire said,

"Your purity is not based on what you've done with your body. It's based on what Jesus did with His."  
**Sheila Wray Gregoire, *The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex***

Let's pray